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ACT005

LESSON NO. 1

GLENN BRANCA

Acute Records

TRACK ONE

LESSON NO. 1 FOR ELECTRIC GUITAR (8:13)

Glenn Branca – Guitar
Anthony Coleman – Organ
Michael Gross – Guitar
F.L. Schröder – Bass
Stephan Wischerth – Drums

TRACK TWO

DISSONANCE (11:37)

Glenn Branca – Guitar
Anthony Coleman – Keyboards
F.L. Schröder – Bass
Harry Spitz – Sledgehammer
Stephan Wischerth – Drums

TRACK THREE

BAD SMELLS (16:26)

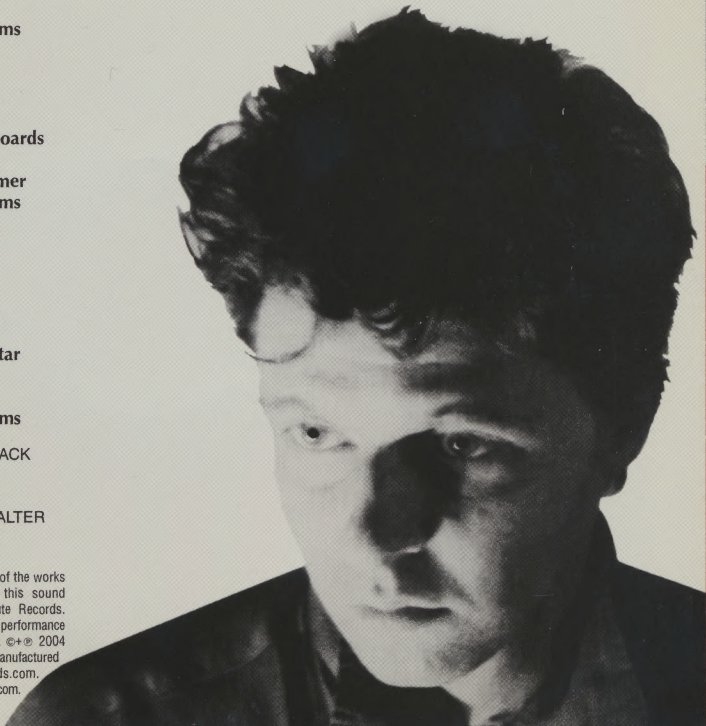
Glenn Branca – Guitar
Thurston Moore – Guitar
Lee Ranaldo – Guitar
David Rosenbloom – Guitar
Ned Sublette – Guitar
Jeffrey Glenn – Bass
Stephan Wischerth – Drums

BONUS QUICKTIME VIDEO TRACK

SYMPHONY NO. 5 (17:29)

REMASTERED BY WEASEL WALTER
LINER NOTES BY ALAN LICHT

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GLENN BRANCA

LESSON NO. 1

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Has anyone ever called Glenn Branca the first post-modern composer? If not, better late than never. Branca was the first of the post-minimalist generation to embrace both tonality and dissonance, and the first to emerge from a background as a rock listener and player. In the early 70s, Branca's multiple-guitar rival Rhys Chatham, was running the Kitchen, while Glenn was listening to the New York Dolls and Get Your Wings every night on headphones, and he once told an interviewer that making "screaming feedback for half an hour, 45 minutes at a time" as a teenager was "how I learned how to write music." Moreover, he

was the first composer to take rock's potential as a clearing house for any number of avant garde conceits (as first posited by the electroacoustic applications of Hendrix/Yardbirds/Who and the more self-conscious tape experimentalism of the Beatles and the Dead's Anthem of the Sun) to a logical conclusion in a neo-classical/post-punk context that exploded the dire rock/classical miscarriages of 70s progressive rock.

Indeed, it seemed inevitable that a climate where Blue Gene Tyranny could apprentice in Detroit with both Robert Ashley and the Stooges, and avant-classical types like Tom Johnson & Chatham would go to CBGBs and connect the three chords of the Ramones with monochords of La Monte Young or Phill Niblock would ultimately produce a figure like Branca. He started exploring extended song-form in the Static with the theatrical "Inspirez/Expirez." Lesson #1 picks up where "Inspirez Expirez" leaves off, and is the first recorded example of an extended instrumental composition from the No Wave scene (Chatham's "Guitar Trio" predates it but wasn't released until '88). But, for all of Glenn's classical aspirations, it was still presented within a rock framing device—a 12-inch single with an A & B side, just like a rock and roll 45. In fact, Lesson #1 corresponds to the dynamics of the singles he released with his bands Theoretical Girls and the Static, with a brighter sounding piece on the A-side and a brooding, oppressive piece on the flip (in fact, the heartbeat rhythm of the Static b-side "Don't Let Me Stop You" creeps into "Dissonance" six minutes in). Since rock bands had replaced the orchestra volume-wise, Branca was the first to recognize that the post-modern composer should be writing for rock instrumentation, and that an extrapolation of the rock band format could be used to similarly modify sonata or symphonic forms. And no one since has touched him; as Anthony Coleman has pointed out, "the work he did when he was playing with the idea of a rock band which functions as a composer's canvas was so much richer than that of so many composers (many of them clearly influenced by Branca) who have tried to infuse their essentially academic music with the dream of Rock, with the wish for its energy. Glenn worked on the front lines, and you can hear that."

Buoyed by the response to his first multiple guitar piece, "Instrumental for Six Guitars" at the 1979 Max's Kansas City Easter Festival, Branca decided to bag his band endeavors and concentrate on the instrumental tip. He came up with a bunch of compositions but had no label to put them out. He'd been going into 99, Gina Franklyn's clothing store on MacDougal St. where her boyfriend, Ed Bahlman, sold records and was quickly giving Bleeker Bob a run for his money as the hippest new wave selection in town. It turned out that Bahlman had been thinking of doing a label, so Glenn convinced him to start up 99 Records with Lesson #1 as the first release (Franklyn designed the cover). Following his commercial instincts, on the A-side he used a two guitar/bass/organ/drum lineup much more in keeping with standard rock instrumentation. On "Dissonance" he overdubs himself playing the guitar parts; in "Lesson #1" Michael Gross plays the second guitar (Gross had played in Flucts, whose other guitarist, Lee Ranaldo, would soon be playing with Branca and later Sonic Youth). Coleman, who met Branca while working at the Soho Music Gallery (when Branca told him the Static was better than the Henry Cow record he was playing in the store

at the time), played keyboards. This was his first recording and he would go on to become a downtown fixture in the John Zorn/Marc Ribot circle. Stephen Wiscerth came to Branca's attention in the band Youth in Asia, which had recently split up, and he would work with Branca for many years afterward. "Lesson #1" was "very clearly a very easy piece that was meant to be a kind of rock minimalism" Branca told interviewer Alec Foege. While the minimalist influence is evident (it does resemble a rock transliteration of Terry Riley's "Rainbow in Curved Air"), the new wave guitar figures are almost proto-U2, and Coleman recalls that Glenn was listening heavily to Joy Division's "Love Will Tear Us Apart" at the time. Sure enough, you can almost sing Ian Curtis' melody over it. "Dissonance", on the other hand, "was meant to be a prototypical idea of rock music as dissonant." It's prototypical Branca, with massed clusters of dissonant guitars, passages of intense chromaticism, and up-and-down-the-neck buzzing seemingly transposed from Tommy Hall's lysergic jug-work with the 13th Floor Elevators. Harry Spitz was brought in on "sledgehammer", but his metallic whacks sound merely like hiccups 25 years later (unlike Zev's industrial strength contributions to Symphony #2). Lesson #1 got 99 off to a good start; besides releasing The Ascension they're best remembered for bringing the world ESG and Liquid Liquid's "Cavern" (which became the basis of a landmark sampling case when Grandmaster Flash heisted its bassline for "White Lines").

"Bad Smells" is an overlooked transitional work in the Branca oeuvre. It was recorded by the Ascension lineup (Rinaldo, David Rosenbloom, Ned Sublette, Branca, guitars, Jeffrey Glenn bass, Wiscerth drums) plus the new addition of Rinaldo's Sonic Youth-mate Thurston Moore on guitar. It was written for a Twyla Sharp dance and released on a split LP with poet John Giorno, "Who You Staring At?", on Giorno's own Giorno Poetry Systems label. Giorno was notable for releasing spoken word/music albums with the hippest downtown names on them at any given time, and had himself only shared discs with the likes of William Burroughs and Laurie Anderson, so it says a lot for Branca's standing in New York at the time that he was invited to do this record. Tim Sommer (who would later play with Branca, not to mention sign Hootie and the Blowfish in a later incarnation as a major label A & R man) dismissed it in a review of Symphony #3 in the Village Voice as watered down Branca for the "punk-funk crowd" of the time (Contortions/Blood Ulmer fans, I guess), but history has proved him wrong. This is actually Branca's most varied and unpredictable piece to date. He packs more contrast into these 16 and a half minutes than he does in most of his symphonies. The first three minutes almost sound like a renegade Ennio Morricone soundtrack to an imaginary spaghetti western, with galloping drums, feedback, and guitar harmonics. The guitars are less dense than in any other Branca piece, leaving plenty of space to notice the many different six string timbres here. The drums change several times, from the galloping beat to a herky-jerky rhythm that probably prompted the punk-funk comparison to full-stop completely; this also sets it apart from the usual continuity in his pieces. Ghostly chords point toward the harmonic guitars of Symphony #3 then give way to short stabbing punctuations that reach back to Theoretical Girls days. The quick-change juxtapositions

also seems to reflect the post-modern feeling in early 80s New York art and music scenes—this is the closest Branca ever came to Zorn's genre-hopping, Christian Marclay's turntable concatenations or the deconstructions of Robert Longo or Jean-Michel Basquiat. And why not? After all, he was the first post-modern composer...

Alan Licht, Winter, 2003



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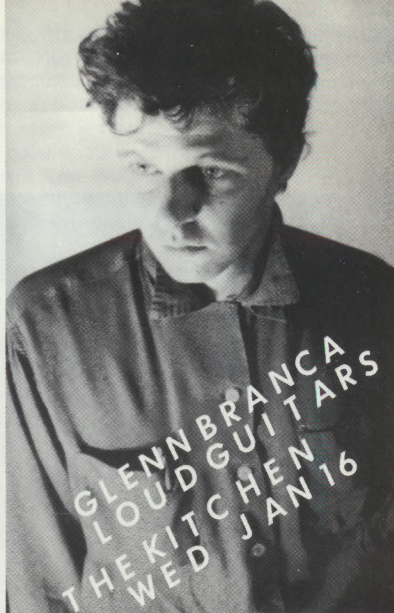
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BONUS QUICKTIME VIDEO TRACK

SYMPHONY NO. 5 (17:29)

Lesson No. 1 For Electric Guitar and Dissonance originally released 1980 on 99 Records as 99-01. Composition & arrangement-Glenn Branca. Producer-Mark Bingham. Assistant producers-Glenn Branca, Ed Bahlman. Engineer-Craig Bishop. Mixing engineer-Jim Bonnefond. Master engineer-Howie Weinberg. Photograph-Carla Liss. Original sleeve design & layout-Gina Franklyn.

Bad Smells originally released 1982 on *Giorno Poetry Systems* as GPS 025, "Who You Staring At?" Glenn Branca /John *Giorno*. Music by Glenn Branca for the dance *Bad Smells*. Choreographed by Twyla Tharp. Produced by James Farber. Recording and mixing engineer Don Hunerberg at Radio City Music Hall Studio. Commissioned by the Twyla Tharp Dance Foundation. Photographs by James Hamilton. Original sleeve design by George Delmerico.



Symphony No. 5 video by Gary Wachter with Brian Wachs, Tony Cobbs and Aleks Rosenberg. Recorded 11/84. Featuring Stephan Wischerth, Tim Sommer, Dan Braun, Al Arthur, Greg Letson, Miriam Sussman, Jonathan Bepler, Hanh Rowe, Evans Wohlforth, Mathew Munisteri, Mark Roule and Peggy Brandon.

Digitally Remastered by Weasel Walter

Liner notes by Alan Licht

Design and Production by Dan Selzer and Todd Hyman.

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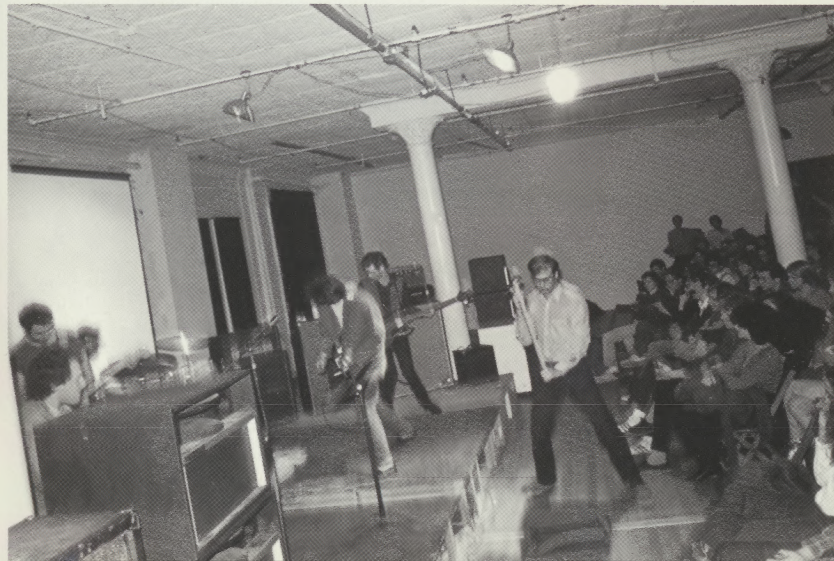
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PROMO

glenn branca
lesson no.1

ACT005 cd (adv)



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GLENN BRANCA

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